

Omnipotent

God is *omnipotent* or *all-powerful*:

Watch and discuss this video clip from *The Simpsons*.

NED: Homer, it me, Ned.

HOMER: Oh right, the God dude. Hey, I got a question for you. [Pulls out a piece of paper.] Could Jesus microwave a burrito so hot that he himself could not eat it?

NED: Well sir, of course, he could, but then again . . . wow, as melon-scratchers go that's a honey-doodle.³⁰

How would you respond to Homer's question?

El Shaddai

Many times throughout the scripture, God is called the Almighty—Hebrew *Shaddai* (שַׁדַּי) or Greek *Pantokratōr* (παντοκράτωρ).

Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Ex 6:3; Num 24:4, 16; Ruth 1:20–21; Job 5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:3, 5; 11:7; 13:3; 15:25; 21:15, 20; 22:3, 17, 23, 25–26; 23:16; 24:1; 27:2, 10–11, 13; 29:5; 31:2, 35; 32:8; 33:4; 34:10, 12; 35:13; 37:23; 40:2; Psa 68:14; 91:1; Is 13:6; Ezek 1:24; 10:5; Joel 1:15; 2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22

The Latin term is *Omni Potens* meaning “all power.” Although, the terms *omnipotence* and *all-powerful* may lead us to think of physical strength, we should think of actualizing (making real) certain states of affairs instead. When we say God is omnipotent, we do not mean that he is some kind of great body builder. Instead, we mean that he is able accomplish anything he wants to accomplish. God’s omnipotence is exemplified in his creation of the universe out of nothing. As *omniscience* describes the scope of God’s knowledge, *omnipotence* describes the scope of God’s influence. As creatures made in the *image of God* we too have influence and can accomplish some of our will, but God, who is *omnipotent*, can accomplish all of his will.

“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2 NIV).

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God’” (Mark 10:27).

In order to better understand *omnipotence* and how it relates to God as *the greatest possible being* the next three sections will cover what God cannot do. Although the idea that there are some things God cannot do may seem sacrilegious at first, once we have covered this material, I hope you will agree that God’s inability to do these things results in God being even greater than he would be were he able to do them.

Omnipotence and Holiness

God’s omnipotence does not imply an ability to sin. As we learned earlier, God is *holy* or *morally perfect* and that sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). Were God to sin, it would violate his holiness. Therefore, the Scripture maintains that it is “impossible for God lie” (Hebrews 6:18) or even “be tempted by evil” (James 1:13).

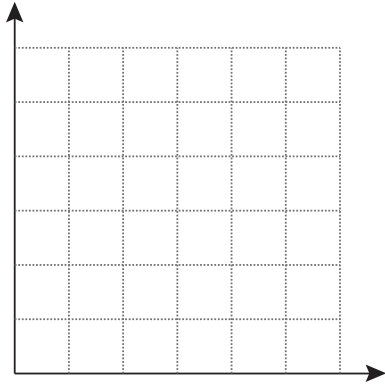
Note: Jesus was tempted during the period between his *incarnation* and his resurrection (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:13; Lk 4:2; Heb 2:18; 4:15). He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15). However, Jesus—who is genuinely God and genuinely man—is incapable of sinning due to his divine nature but capable of experiencing temptation (at least pre-resurrection) due to his human nature. The Son took on a human nature that in and of itself could sin, but would not because it was the Son who took on this nature.

Omnipotence and Immutability

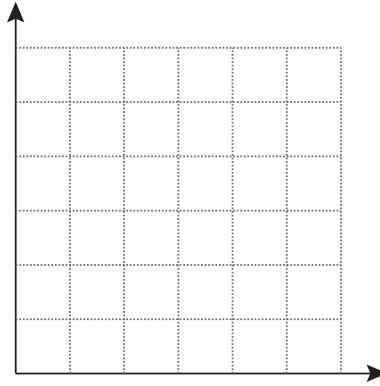
God’s omnipotence does not imply an ability to act against his own nature. “[God] cannot disown himself” (2 Timothy 2:14). He is *immutable* (unchangeable) in his existence, character, and purposes. Therefore God is free and has free will, but will always act consistently with his own nature. God cannot stop being God.

The Omnipotence Paradox

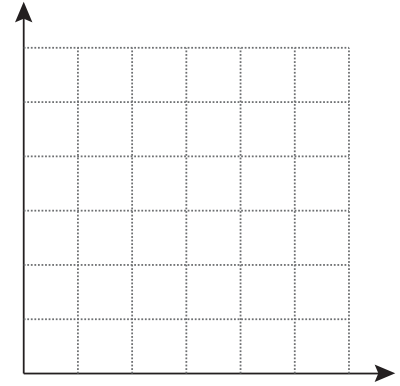
At the beginning of this lesson we met a modern rephrasing of the *omnipotence paradox* by Homer Simpson. Before we deal with the traditional version, or Homer's rephrasing, attempt the following exercise: On each of the three grids below, draw the object described at the bottom of the grid.



A closed shape with 4 sides of equal length and 4 equal angles.



A closed shape with a perimeter always an equal distance from its center.



A closed shape with 4 sides of equal length, 4 equal angles, and a perimeter always an equal distance from its center.

The tradition version of the paradox is as follows: "Can God create a stone even he cannot lift?" Both the square-circle and the immovable stone challenge God to do the logically impossible. However, the Christian need not (and should not) affirm that God can do the logically impossible. If something is a circle; it is not a square. If someone can move any stone, then no stone is immovable. Further, the laws of logic are not external consternates placed on God but are derived from God's own nature.

Questions About God's Omnipotence
